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FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES  
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UNCLAS BUENOS AIRES 000337

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SUBJECT: ARGENTINA: CABINET CHIEF FERNANDEZ DEFENDS "PROPER AND  
MATURE" RELATIONSHIP WITH USG

¶1. (SBU) In response to press stories asserting that U.S.-Argentine relations continued to sour, Chief of Cabinet Minister Alberto Fernandez spoke to the local media March 14 characterizing the U.S.-Argentina relationship as "proper and mature, based on mutual respect...even though both countries have different positions." Commenting on the exclusion of Argentina from Secretary Rice's South America travel itinerary, Fernandez told the press that "the Secretary's trip had been scheduled ahead of time," and that the GOA

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does not consider the fact that she was not stopping in Buenos Aires as "politically significant". Fernandez confirmed that he and ex-President Nestor Kirchner had been invited to New York by the Council of the Americas and said that the last time he had talked with WHA A/S Thomas Shannon, the A/S had suggested that during the visit they meet and discuss regional developments as well as bilateral relations. Fernandez added that the dates of the visit had not yet been set.

¶2. (SBU) Comment: Fernandez's March 14 remarks were an effort to minimize recent press speculation (intensified by a recent New York Times article) that the Secretary's bypassing of Argentina on her recent trip indicated that GOA-USG relations are still "frozen" or growing worse. Fernandez' remarks are in line with his private commitment to defend the relationship and mark a clear effort by the GOA to act with more restraint in how it reacts to what are portrayed in the local media as slights from the United States. Similarly, despite provocative press pieces about the recent U.S. Human Rights and Investment Climate reports, the government has remained silent.

WAYNE